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## WERE INDIANS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL OF THE PETERBOROUGH PETROGLYPHS?

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### ABSTRACT

Many decades ago, several epigraphers claimed that numerous inscriptions on a large limestone rock near Peterborough, Canada, indicated that they were made during the Scandinavian Bronze Age by Scandinavian visitors and contained a Proto-Tifinagh (known in north africa) alphabet. But while many continued to assert that all of the inscriptions were made by early Algonquian Indians, as far as I knew, no one published a paper showing that the claims of a Nordic presence were incorrect. I recently learned that such a paper, overlooked by archaeologists, and other scholars, was in fact published in 2004 by Joan Vastokas (who had mapped the inscriptions on the Peterborough rock) as a chapter in a book on North American Rock-Art. This paper provides a detailed examination of her chapter. Vastokas provides an extensive discussion of ancient Indian culture and evidence that the Indians inscribed glyphs at Peterborough. But, as I will show, she presents no evidence that Indians could have been the source of the Bronze Age inscriptions and essentially ignores the presence of a Proto-Tifinagh alphabet.

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**KEYWORDS:** Nordic mythology, Bronze Age watercraft, sun boat, Proto-Tifinagh alphabet, alphabet, rock art, Indian.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It has now been 36 years since Barry Fell, retired Professor of Invertebrate Zoology at Harvard and epigrapher, published the *Bronze Age America* (Fell, 1982). In that book he made astonishing claims that many of the petroglyphs on a large limestone rock at Peterborough, Canada (Fig.1), were Nordic in origin dating from the Bronze Age in Scandinavia. Up to that time all the petroglyphs were thought to be of Indian origin. As some of Fell's previous claims about other pre-Columbus inscriptions had aroused controversy, most archaeologists who expressed an opinion were highly skeptical of the claims in his book and effectively ignored them.

But then Professor David H. Kelley, a highly regarded archaeologist and epigrapher, decided to take the time to travel to some sites and review Fell's work on Ogham inscriptions in the Americas as well as his work at Peterborough ( Fig. 2). Kelley was widely published on a range of subjects including important contributions to the translation of the Maya Script. In his review (Kelley, 1990). he considered that, as far as Peterborough was concerned, Fell's work on the inscriptions was of major importance with wide implications. Kelley agreed with Fell on the following key points:

a) The Iconography of parts of the Peterborough site are thoroughly Bronze Age Scandinavian in their depiction of several classes of watercraft.

b) Many figures from Nordic mythology can be readily identified.

c) An alphabet is present among the petroglyphs closely resembling the Tifinagh alphabet. The symbols representing the letters of the alphabet encircle the glyphs rather than appearing in the form of a linear script.

Despite its astonishing and important conclusions, no response to this paper appeared in the literature. Kelley continued to work on the problem and in 1992 participated in a Symposium, "Across Before Columbus", sponsored by the New England Antiquities Research Association (NEARA) at Brown University. This resulted in the publication of a paper (Kelley, 1994). The same paper was included in a book on the 1992 Symposium published by NEARA in 1998.

Kelley's second paper in 1994 contains a detailed comparison between the alphabet at Peterborough and the Tifinagh and Libyan alphabets. He noted that the most striking difference between these latter two alphabets is the use of patterns of dots for seven letters in Tifinagh where Libyan has patterns of bars for these letters. The alphabet at Peterborough used dots which indicated that the Tifinagh was the older form. For that reason, Kelley labeled the Peterbor-

ough alphabet as Proto-Tifinagh. The paper contains an extensive discussion of the various symbols comprising the alphabet, their acoustic values, and the question of possible changes over the years. Kelley states that, "they provide utterly convincing evidence that the inscriptions of Peterborough are written in the Proto-Tifinagh alphabet". The paper also shows the comparison of the letters with what is found on Scandinavian Bronze Age sites and the world famous stone inscription site in Camonica Valley, Italy.

A recent paper (Sternberg 2016) provided evidence from the literature that such a trip by Scandinavians to Canada during the Scandinavian bronze age was not farfetched and that the Tifinagh alphabet could have found its way to North Africa where it was used by ancient Berbers.

## 2. AN OVERLOOKED PAPER

One would have expected that those who believed that all the inscriptions at Peterborough were made by Indians would have responded to Kelley's papers. But I was not aware of any literature response until just recently. I received a note from Jean-Loïc Le Quellec calling my attention to a paper titled "The Peterborough Petroglyphs: Native or Norse?" by Joan Vastokas (Vastokas, 2004).

Vastokas, one of mappers of the petroglyphs at Peterborough, considered the Indians responsible for the inscriptions. There is no indication that archaeologists and scholars, including Kelley were aware of her paper, as it was published in a book on Rock-Art. In her conclusion, she states that: "*the Norse never once set foot or paddle upon the isolated limestone outcrop in the backwoods of southern Ontario*". As I will show, she provides no evidence that Kelley's principal findings, enumerated above, are false or incorrect. In fact, most of Kelley's findings are simply ignored.

## 3. DETERMINING NATIVE OR NORSE

The issue is not Native or Norse as Vastokas formulates it. She focuses on the question of whether Native Americans or Norsemen physically carved the glyphs. Instead the focus must be on the content of the petroglyphs themselves and whether there is any evidence that the Indians could have provided that content. Mapping the site was a complex and daunting task. Vastokas noted that the glyphs were not carved all at once. While she focused on evidence of carving in the period 500-1500 AD, she states that «it is entirely possible that the earliest glyphs were carved during the Early or Middle Woodland period (1000 BC-500 AD) or even during the Archaic period (5000-1000 BC). As she notes elsewhere: «*While our scale map indicates some 300 leg-*

ible and 600 less-legible glyphs, myriad others were not even mapped by us owing to their almost complete erosion by weather and time». When Native inscribers went to work over a thousand years later than the Scandinavian Bronze Age, the limestone rock could already

have contained the Norse inscriptions many of which the Natives could have copied. That was, in fact, suggested by Fell (1982).

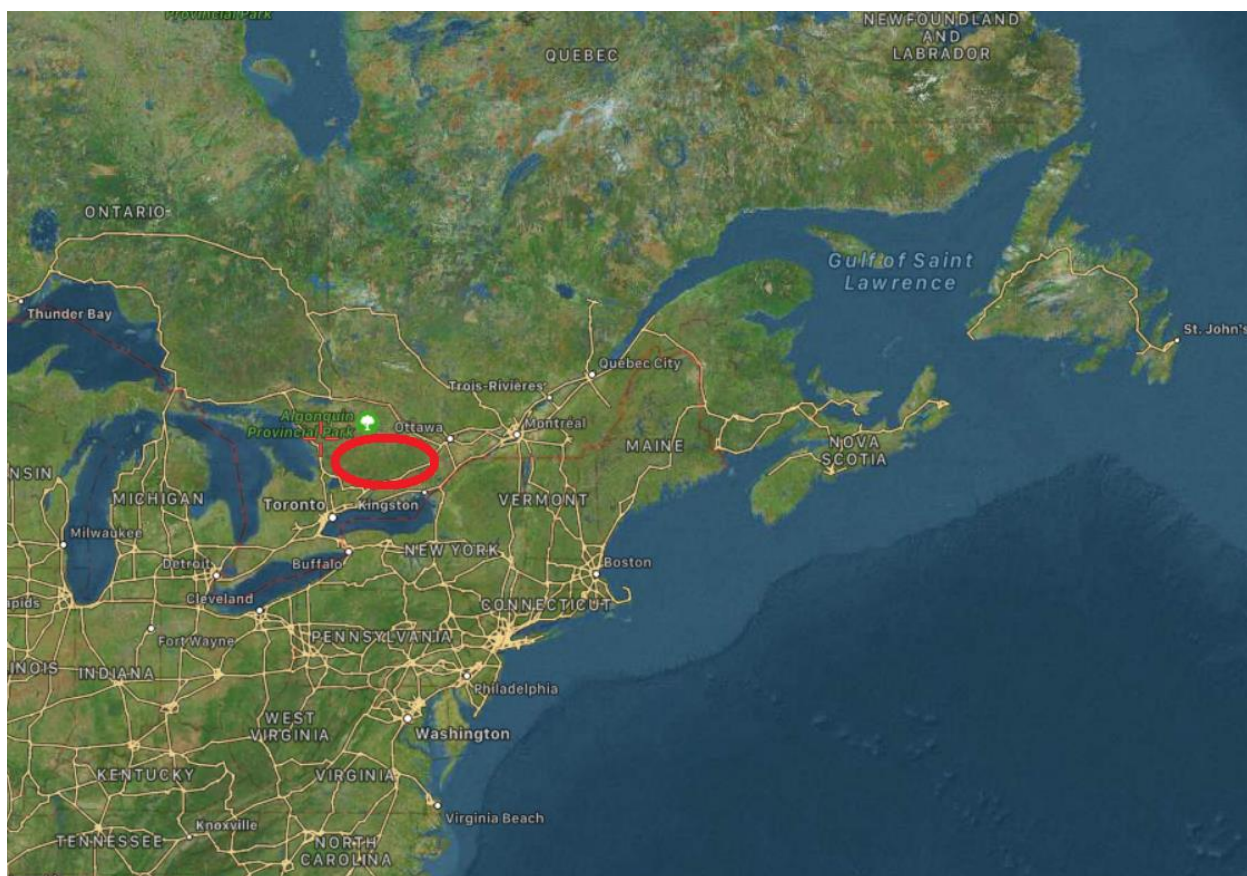


Figure 1. The Peterborough area with petroglyphs.

#### 4. DEPICTIONS OF WATERCRAFT

In the 1973 report, (Vestokas & Vestokas, 1973) Vestokas's acknowledge that the boats carved at Peterborough, later cited by Kelley, exhibit some general similarity to Bronze Age Scandinavian rock-art images. They clearly have no connection with the birch-bark canoes used by the Algonquians. Her response was to state that *"any similarity between the Peterborough and Bohulan boat images are accountable not by trans-Atlantic contact but by their common, more ancient, circumpolar pictorial heritage."* So, the Algonquians knew how the Scandinavian Bronze Age artists represented ships over a thousand years earlier, yet the only place such knowledge was exhibited was in the images engraved at Peterborough. This is certainly not evidence that the engraving of the four classes of watercraft at Peterborough originated with the Indians.

According to a journalist's article (Harvey, 1999), there was active discussion in 1999 about one very special boat image at Peterborough called "the solar ship" which, according to Kelley, was almost identi-

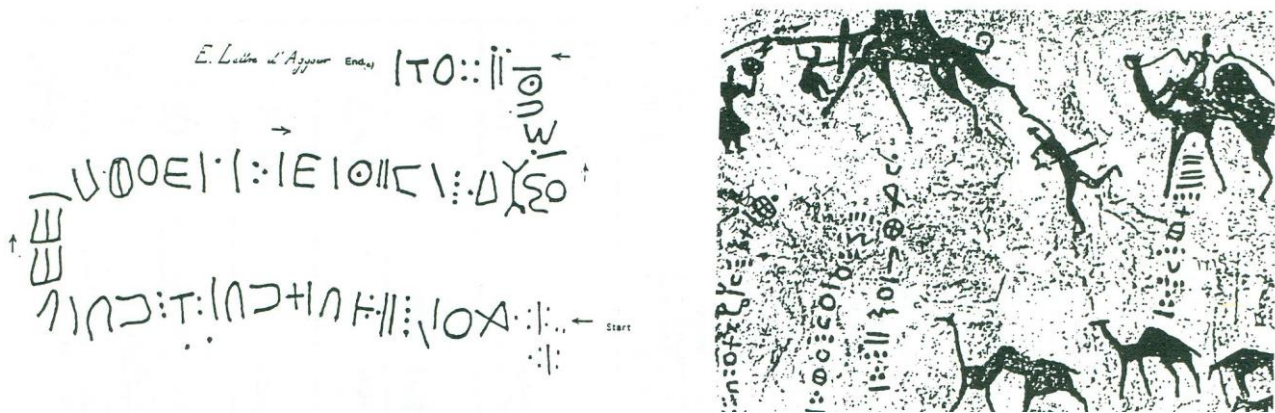
cal to ships carved in a rock near Boslund, Sweden. Vastokas did not disagree with Kelley's observation. She says in her 2004 paper that *"in all its details-zoomorphic prow steering sweep rayed solar mast-it has no clear affinity in the birch-bark scrolls or any other pictorial Algonquian material so far published."* One reservation that Vastokas expresses is that in the Bohuslan ship carvings boats with a central mast are topped with a round disk represented as a spoked wheel. On the image of the boat ship at Peterborough the disk at the top of the mast is represented as a rayed disk. But then Vastokas goes on to say: *"To this day, we have qualms about the accuracy of that recorded image, owing to the innumerable worn-out glyphs that it overlaps and the uncertainty of whether the sun-topped mast belongs to the boat or to an older underlying sun figure.."*

So what are we to make of all this? The image of the boat had no known precedents among Algonquian materials but closely resembled a Scandinavian ship carving. Vastokas presents nothing to justify dismissing this evidence of a Nordic presence.





(A)



(B)

Figure 2 a) Detail of petroglyphs (from Kelly 1994, Figure 1b (original Photos courtesy of Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources), b) left: A Tifinagh letter, North Africa Late 19th century. The letter was turned as it was read (Fell 1989, 188); right: Tifinagh inscriptions, Tassili, Algeria (Fell 1987, 26) (courtesy by Kelly 1994).

## 5. FIGURES FROM NORDIC MYTHOLOGY

Many of the figures from Nordic mythology listed by Kelley in his 1990 paper are very distinctive. There is the figure of Tsiw, a sky god, alongside the giant wolf Wenri. According to Nordic mythology, Tsiw sacrificed his hand to Wenri so the gods could permanently tie up Wenri. Blood drips from his missing hand in the depiction. Then there is the picture of the god Thunor with his giant glove Glofi, Woden, a sky god, with his spear Gungnir, and so on.

Vastokas simply ignores these figures with one exception: she misidentifies one of the mythology figures as a shaman (her figure 16.4a) because the figure has a cone shaped hat (or head). She explains at some length that the cone serves as an icon for the Indians of the extraordinary spiritual power of shamans and appears in many places. But she doesn't claim that the figure itself appears anywhere in the scrolls. There is a good reason for this. Figure 16.4a is a recognizable representation of the god

Thor carrying the short handled hammer Mjolnir in his right hand. It has nothing to do with shamans.

Vastokas notes near the end of her paper that "the imagery at the Peterborough site may have many parallels with other forms of religious Algonquian iconography, but there are also images that remain distinctive and often unique that are not found in the scrolls." Perhaps these are images from Nordic mythology but the word mythology doesn't appear in her paper and she doesn't identify these images in any way.

## 6. THE TIFINAGH ALPHABET

The second Kelley paper (1994, 1998) was mostly devoted to presenting and discussing the details of the alphabet found at Peterborough and comparing it with the Tifinagh and Libyan North African alphabets; alphabets found on Scandinavian Bronze Age carvings; and a partial examination of carvings at Camonica Valley, Italy. There is an extensive discussion of the symbols and acoustic values and their possible evolution during the thousands of years between the Bronze Age and today.

Before saying more, it is perhaps relevant to consider how the alphabet at Peterborough was discovered. As previously noted, the symbols representing the alphabet were not arranged in a line of script. They were rather spread around the figures. Kelley stated that he himself would not have recognized that an alphabet was present if Fell had not pointed it out. So why was Fell so perceptive?

As it turned out, as a result of his life-long interest in old alphabets, Fell had previously spent time in North Africa and was familiar with the Tifinagh alphabet still in use by some groups for personal communications. Fell was surprised to discover the same abstract symbols at Peterborough. Kelley noted that Scandinavian scholars had undoubtedly the same problem he had in recognizing the presence of an alphabet. As far as I know, they still do not recognize that an alphabet is present in their Bronze age carvings.

So, what does Vastokas have to say about Kelley's paper on the alphabets? First, she presents a Figure 16.3, which is a letter in modern Tifinagh script written by a young Tuareg woman. Then she refers to the Tifinagh script as "with its extremely simple set of dots, dashes, and crosses as its alphabet". She asserts that both Fell and Kelley have freely and arbitrarily selected "dots" from her illustrations to make the case for a Tifinagh script.

This is a gross misrepresentation of what Kelley says in his paper. Yes, seven letters are represented by patterns of dots and there is one cross in Tifinagh, but there are symbols for another 15 letters where additional symbols are used for ligatures. At Peterborough, for Proto-Tifinagh, Kelley notes that there is "a restricted set of approximately 31 forms for the alphabet, some very rare, that many are repeated with frequency, and that some sequences are repeated". Thus, Vastokas simply dismisses the finding of a proto-Tifinagh alphabet at Peterborough without any analysis of Kelley's work.

## 7. DISCUSSION & CONCLUDING REMARKS

The basic objective of my work is to lead to a solution of the century old mystery of the language spoken by the ancient Berbers using the Tifinagh alphabet. The claimed identification of a proto-Tifinagh alphabet on the rock at Peterborough, as presented

in detail by Kelley, is obviously a key issue. Many, including the authorities at the Peterborough Provincial Park, have insisted all the petroglyphs at Peterborough were the work of Indians. As this paper shows, that view is not tenable. Secondly many have questioned the plausibility of Scandinavians making such a voyage to Canada in ancient times. As discussed in my 2016 paper, in 1898 Verplanck Colvin technically analyzed Plutarch's account of ancient voyages to the New World and concluded that ancient sailors knew and used a path across the North Atlantic to present day Newfoundland. A recent comprehensive paper (Liritzis et al, 2018) independently analyzed Plutarch's work and came to the same conclusion. The return of the sailors to Europe was by a more southern route at about the latitude of Spain. That leaves the question as to how did the Tifinagh alphabet get to North Africa in the hands of the Berbers and what language were the early Berbers speaking? Kelley presented some evidence that the Proto-Tifinagh alphabet was known elsewhere in Europe and I noted in my 2016 paper that there is archaeological evidence that some south European peoples from where the Danube enters the Black Sea were part of the Peoples from the Sea in the battles with Egypt and could have settled west of Egypt after the battles with Egypt which ended about 1200 BC.

These are of course questions that have not yet been answered by scholars. But the fact that the Proto-Tifinagh alphabet was used to express a Bronze Age European language suggests that the language of the Early Berbers may have been a Bronze Age European language. The famous Dougga bilingual monument (now in the British Museum in London) can be used to definitively answer this question, since presumably the same message was written separately in the Libyco alphabet, which could be read, and the ancient Berber alphabet which so far hasn't been read. The previous attempts to identify the Berber language have tried known Berber and Mediterranean languages without success. As far as I know, no one has examined the possibility that the unknown language was Proto-European. Perhaps experts in the reconstruction of European Bronze Age languages could have more success. There are many ancient Tifinagh inscriptions in North Africa that are waiting to be read.

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